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AUTHOR	Miles, Libby
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ABSTRACT

In "Fragments of Rationality" (1992), Lester Faigley says that the practice of making contradictions coherent has a great deal to do with the power a writing teacher exercises in the classroom. The way in which historians of writing use textbooks in their research, however, removes power from the writing teacher and from the classroom, locating it instead in the book itself and with the historian who analyzes and interprets it. Faigley states that "textual coherence is privileged because it reduces conflict to a matter of textual tensions." This is the coherent contradiction in the historiographical method. Faigley is supporting a research methodology that explicitly takes into consideration a contextual and institutional analysis of the documents under analysis. Most scholarship concerning textbooks has a product orientation (75%) versus a process orientation. Textbooks are used in ways that separate the published textbook from its mode of production and the material conditions which gave rise to it. While authors and publishers affect the text prior to publication, teachers and students generate texts using the textbook after it leaves the publishers' warehouse. A method which delves more into the processes surrounding textbook production and dissemination and which actively seeks out a range of discursive traces from a range of voices within the power structure would be a more productive historiography. (Contains a chart showing avenues of inquiry for composition textbooks, a list of discursive traces for a historiography, and 9 references.) (CR)

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Libby Miles, Purdue University
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Coherent Contradictions:

Product Analyses in a Process-Oriented Field

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Introduction and Overview

Somewhere in the excitement of preparing the CCCC program, both the title and the topic of my paper were mysteriously changed. In fact, the paper I proposed, the paper that was accepted, and the paper I wrote have nothing to do with electronic discourse or intellectual property; those issues are a part of another project. The correct title of my paper today is: "Coherent Contradictions: Product Analyses in a Process-Oriented Field." That title suggests the plan for the three things I hope to do in my time with you today: first, to explain the "coherent contradiction" as Lester Faigley has articulated it; second, to explain that "coherent contradiction" as it plays out in the historical research we do with textbooks; and third, to posit a more "productive" historiography (there is an intentional play on words there that I will explain shortly).

Faigley's Articulation of "Coherent Contradictions"

In one of the chapters in his 1992 book *Fragments of Rationality*, Lester Faigley takes on textbooks, and he includes an analysis of several contemporary "rhetorics" in his discussion of postmodern student subjectivities. The title of Faigley's chapter on which I am drawing is "Coherent Contradictions: The Conflicting Rhetoric of Writing Textbooks." The goal of his chapter, Faigley writes, is "to show ... that suppressing contradictions to achieve coherence involves more than training students for a future in corporate America or shaping students as rational subjects" (1992, 133) – both points which have been argued ably by others, particularly

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Richard Ohmann and John Clifford. Rather, Faigley argues "that the practice of making contradictions coherent has a great deal to do with the power a writing teacher exercises in the classroom" (1992, 133-4). Throughout this paper, I will trace the shifts of power.

In Faigley's formation, then, there are many forms "coherent contradictions" may take. They may be in the contradictory advice in neighboring sections of textbook (such as, "use specific, concrete language" on one page, followed by "generalize your opinions and emotions" on the next), or they may be in the ideologically loaded language that sends contradictory and unproductive messages about student subjectivity. Most importantly, though, for Faigley, the over-riding coherent contradiction is one of the rational, coherent student subject rooted in "the bedrock version of liberal humanism for the resolution of all conflict" (1992, 162). As Faigley says, "[t]extual coherence is privileged because it reduces conflict to a matter of *textual* tensions" (1992, 162, emphasis added). Clearly, Faigley finds this to be a problematic practice.

I want to argue here that as composition scholars we enact a version of this coherent contradiction in some of our historical scholarship -- specifically, in that historical scholarship that relies on the analysis of writing textbooks to provide a picture of what writing instruction looked like at a given point in time. Just as Faigley contends in his chapter that the "practice of making contradictions coherent has great deal to do with the power a writing teacher exercises in the classroom" (1992, 133-4, as qtd. above), I claim that the way in which historians use textbooks in their research removes power from the writing teacher, and removes power from the classroom, while locating it instead within the book itself, and with the historian who analyzes and interprets it. As state above, "[t]extual coherence is privileged because it reduces conflict to a matter of textual tensions" (1992, 162). This is the coherent contradiction in our historiographical method, and one I hope to push in a more productive direction with this discussion today.

Linking Faigley's Coherent Contradiction to General Textbook Scholarship

Let me explain what I mean by stating we enact this coherent contradiction in our scholarship. Elsewhere in the chapter cited above, Faigley suggests that textbooks are "embedded in a long history of institutional practices and discourses that, as Foucault has demonstrated, are themselves mechanisms of power working quietly across social hierarchies and traditional political categories" (1992, 133). I am going to read that to you again in a moment, because I believe Faigley is implying a historiographical method that may help composition scholars push the envelope for discussing a range of instructional materials. Faigley, in my reading, is supporting a research methodology that explicitly takes into consideration a contextual and institutional analysis of the historical documents under analysis – the material conditions of production, if you will. Faigley, after all, wrote this chapter in part to explore

> why Ohmann's critique [of textbooks in *English in America*] seemingly had so little effect either on textbook publishing or on scholarship concerning textbooks, even though the brilliance of his critique was widely appreciated and the book continues to enjoy the status of an underground classic. (1992, 133)

Faigley wants to build on Ohmann's "claim that textbooks are related in complex ways to political and economic structures" (133). He builds on Ohmann by positing that – and here is the important quote I cited above – "[textbooks] are also embedded in a long history of institutional practices and discourses that, as Foucault has demonstrated, are themselves mechanisms of power working quietly across social hierarchies and traditional political categories" (1992, 133). Forgive the repetition, but it is an important point, and the main one on which I will build.

Faigley notes in passing that scholarship concerning textbooks did not change much despite Ohmann's leading the way to a more theoretical treatment in *English in America*. Indeed, I have spent the past four years collecting all the scholarship on composition textbooks I can, and I have found very few that build on Ohmann, and even fewer that take into consideration the

complex mechanisms of power and institutional practices to which Faigley alludes. There is some fine scholarship out there, particularly in the histories of our field (see Berlin, Brereton, Connors, Crowley, Miller, etc.). There is, however, a seriously coherent contradiction in the use of textbooks as documentary evidence in these histories. It is to that contradiction I turn next.

We are a field built on the priviledging of process as a viable area of study. Our scholarship is dominated with attempts to articulate processes; we have adopted protocol analyses to be able to glimpse student writing processes, we put microphones on our bodies to record our students' collaborative processes, we hold workshops to better understand our own evaluation processes. When we talk about instructional materials, however, it is generally in very product-oriented terms. Textbooks are discussed only as static products, at best seen as historical glimpses of ideological reproduction in a particular point in time.

Frankly, this static, end-product conception of textbooks does make them a handy documentary source for our historical research. Perhaps one way to look at our own contradiction is to say that, as historians, the data we can access will always be in product-form – they are the traces left to us from other times. But the "textbook-as-static-entity" view is problematic nonetheless. We may be able to find documentary traces that go beyond the textbook as the end result – and that is what I am encouraging us to do today.

> For now, I will assume for a moment that John Brereton is correct when he asserts that:
>
> The old collegiate curriculum made instructors dependent upon textbooks in ways we find hard to conceive. College catalogs often listed the books to be covered: they *were* the course. (313)

I should say here that although Brereton makes this claim, I have not been able to back it up in my research. Nonetheless, assuming that Brereton's claim fits writing instruction prior to 1875, he is also implying that we have not thought of textbooks in this way for most of the 20th century. In other words, the book does not represent what happens in the course, and we should not treat

textbooks as if they do. As Stuart Blythe writes in his paper "Counting Them Absent: Recognizing the Lack of Student Voices in Histories of Composition Studies," the use of textbooks in this manner is a questionable historiographical practice because:

> "As any instructor knows, a textbook cannot offer an entirely complete or accurate representation of what goes on in a classroom. Some instructors do ... [use] it as the organizing principle for the course; other instructors, however, use the textbook in only peripheral ways. Some rarely refer in class to an assigned text. (2)

Even Faigley articulates the problems with analyzing textbooks alone, again in his discussion of Ohmann:

> By considering only textbooks, Ohmann lacks data on how the books are *used* by teachers, and thus he has little to say about classroom practices in teaching writing (133, emphasis added).

In the next sentence, however, Faigley justifies the methodology (and in fact he needs to make this move, since he will replicate this methodology later in this chapter on textbooks). He writes:

> "But if textbooks are not reliable sources of data for how writing is actually taught, they do reflect teachers' and program directors' decisions about how writing should be represented to students." (133, emphasis added).

So now the power rests not in the writing classroom, nor with the teacher, but with the WPA. We have bracketed out those with the least power who are in fact the ones who actively develop their own readings of, and uses for, these products – writing students and teachers.

Okay, so perhaps we can agree that the static conception of a textbook doesn't allow for the life a textbook has once it has been published, adopted, and bought by students. I would suggest, in addition, that there is an equally rich life the book takes up to the point of production, as it moves from being a teacher's idea -- or an acquisitions editor's signing goal -- to being a

published package with wide distribution. Just as the book shouldn't be used to represent what happens in classrooms, it also shouldn't be used to represent what an author necessarily had in *mind*. Any of you who have authored textbooks and have survived the developmental review process will understand this point all too well. Rather, the produced textbook is a momentary resting point along a historical continuum ... and perhaps an arbitrary stopping point at that. It is merely a point in an ongoing process. A blip on a timeline, albeit a powerful blip.

Let's go now to the state of current scholarship that uses textbooks, both historical scholarship and otherwise. This is a map containing most of the articles I have been collecting, excluding the vast number of dissertations that replicate the methodology I am critiquing today.

[put map up on transparency]

As you can see, this horizontal axis is the key one for my argument today: *product* analysis versus *process* analysis. And, as you can see, most of our scholarship concerning textbooks has a product-orientation; just about 75% of these, in fact, essentially analyze the words on the page, using them as textual evidence of pedagogical and theoretical practices. Most of the historical treatments are centered here ... with a few scattered here and here. Most of the Cultural Studies analyses are here and here.

The other axis is less important to my argument today; it is there as a part of a larger project. I call it the theory/lore axis, and the net effect for today's purposes is to show that the process side of the map is disturbingly empty – under-described, under-practiced, and under-theorized.

I want to say here that an author or article's placement on this map is not necessarily a negatively-charged value judgment. Instead, I am suggesting that we have overwhelmingly been using textbooks in ways that separate the published textbook from its mode of production and the

material conditions which gave rise to it – in effect, decontextualizing and dehistoricizing the history of instructional materials. I am saying that we *did* need these thoughtful discourse analysis of the static words on the textbook page over here on this side of the map just to get us started, but we *also* need to examine the processes behind their creation, dissemination, and reproduction – to begin filling in some of the silent areas over here.

Toward a More "Productive" Historiography

I am arguing, then, for a historiography that delves more into the processes surrounding textbook production and dissemination. In some ways, the Faigley quote I repeated earlier in this paper implies a methodology in which we find the discursive traces of the institutional practices in which the mechanism of powers quietly circulate. So what might this look like? Or, more to the point, what discursive traces might such a method demand that we look *at*?

This chart shows some of the possibilities. Now, I should say from the outset that these are the documents that we might find today, and not all of these would have existed at various moments in history. But all would have emerged at some point, and I would like to encourage historical scholars to find some of these documents that may have existed, that may be sitting in publishers files now – indeed, that may be sitting in the textbook archives that Bob Connors has been building at the University of New Hampshire.

(put the chart on the transparency)

This list contains four generators of texts, all of which impact on the production, exchange, distribution, consumption, and reproduction of textbooks. The first two are before the point of publication; the other two are possibilities for glimpsing the life a book takes on after it

leaves the publishers' warehouse. Lots of people generating lots of text ... all products of a sort, but products that build pictures of processes.

The first column has various author-generated texts, from initial class notes before the idea of a book even occurred to the author, through multiple drafts and revisions, and correspondance with editors, co-authors, freelancers, and so on. Publishers also generate texts by the pound, and this list is the tip of the iceberg. (*go through the list here, explaining where necessary and as time permits)*.

So that takes us to the moment of publication. After the book is out in the field, in students' hands, we can look for the texts generated by the teachers and students using them. *(go through the final two columns, explaining as necessary and as time permits*).

Anyone familiar with John Brereton's *The Origins of Composition Studies in the American College, 1875-1925* will recognize the method I propose here – which actively seeks out a range of discursive traces from a range of voices within the power structure. Obviously, I support Brereton's enterprise.

So why do I call this a more "productive" historiography? Because it focuses explicitly on a variety of sites of production – after all, the production of the textbook is in fact just a part of a larger constellation of other produced documents, many of which specifically articulate material conditions. By focusing more on production, and the traces of documents that surround it, we can do more productive historiography.

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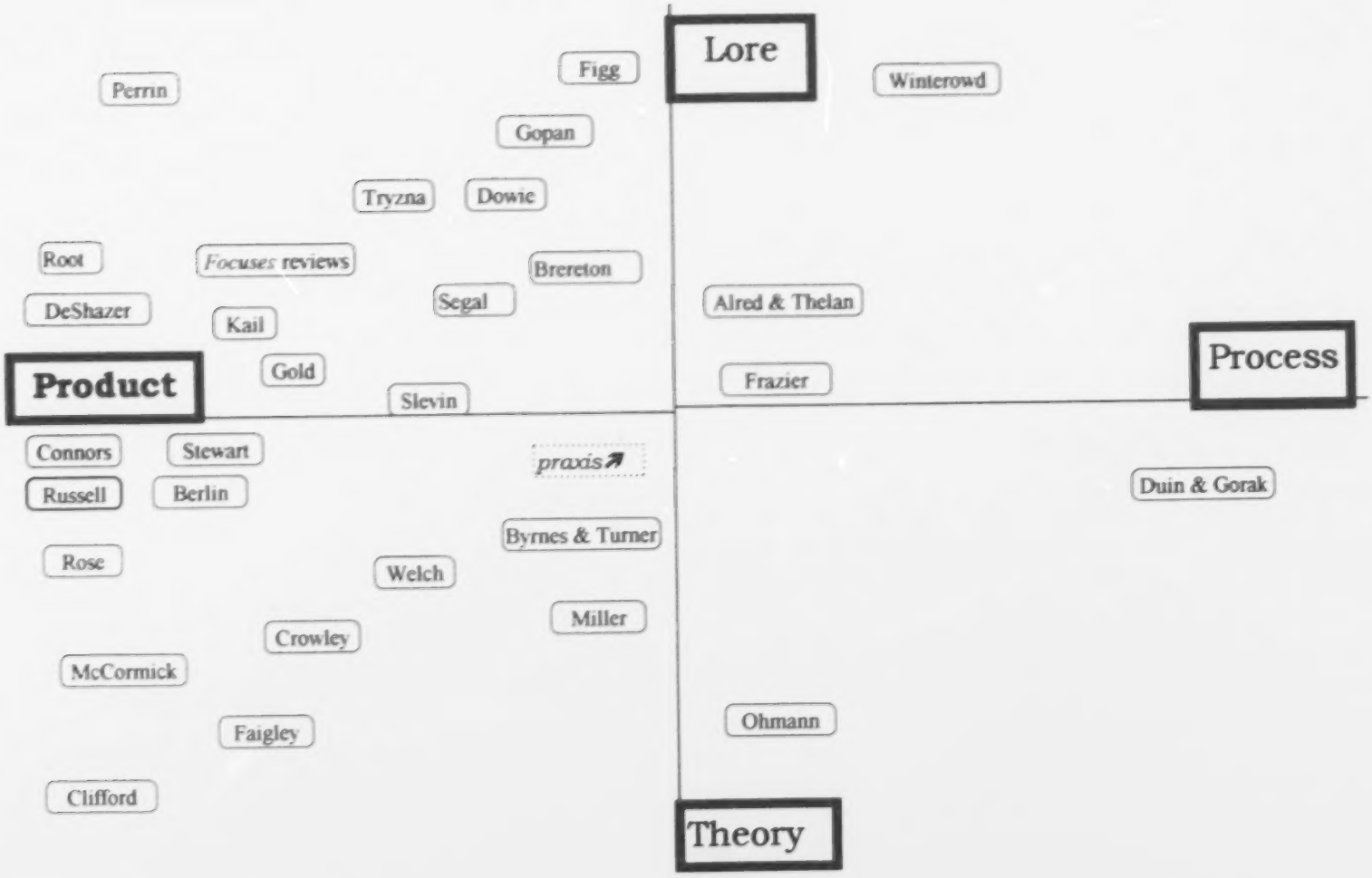
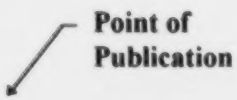
Textbooks in Composition Scholarship: Avenues of Inquiry



Discursive Traces for a Productive Historiography



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